

Director's Report 2014

Many changes were made to both the facilities and services of the Iowa City Public Library this year. The public is using the library in both traditional and new ways. A strategic planning process, including community surveys and focus groups to gather input, took place this year and the Board is ready to adopt a new plan that will guide decisions about services for the next five years.

- Community polling shows 95% of respondents say the library is essential or very important to the quality of life
- Two-year building project completed
- New teen space sees new programming, increased teen use
- Expanded Summer Reading Program with new partners
- Technology improvements to meet needs
- Financial challenges expected by the City; increased importance of fundraising

Looking ahead

A new strategic planning process was initiated this year. A team composed of staff and board members interviewed five consultants, choosing the firm of Himmel & Wilson from Wisconsin to guide the process. Himmel and Wilson conducted one-on-one interviews, held focus groups, and guided the delivery and data analysis for a community-wide survey. A planning committee composed of board members, staff, and representatives from the City and the Friends Foundation discussed and debated the data, and by year's end the outlines of a new plan were in place with a Board discussion set for July.

The proposed plan is built around the theme of Connect-Engage-Enrich, moving from a basic level of connecting people to information to engaging them in dialogue, and ultimately learning to enrich both individuals and the community. The important role that the Library plays in community life was made clear in the responses to the community survey. Nearly 95 percent of the mail survey respondents said that the Iowa City Public Library was either essential or very important to the quality of life in the community. This is the highest response Himmel & Wilson has ever received for a public library. Almost 90 percent of respondents stated that they visited the Library at least five times a year.

Maintaining the community's trust at such high levels and adjusting services to best meet needs with limited budget growth will be challenging, but I am confident that the positive support and enthusiasm for the work of the Library will help us achieve our goals.

Major Building Improvements Completed With Support from Donors

A two-year building improvements project was completed in the Fall. In the first year, the work focused on the entrance and adult space on the second floor. This year, attention shifted to the Ellen Buchanan Children's Room and the second floor. Staff service desks in both locations were downsized and moved to provide assistance where it is most needed. In the Ellen Buchanan Children's Room more space was made for educational play and for technology. A new interactive, multi-user computer table was introduced. New display areas provide opportunities for sharing of books and a new digital sign shares a wealth of information of interest to families.

The highlight of work on the second floor was the construction of an enclosed area specifically for teens, named in honor of a major donor, the Koza Family Teen Center. Young Adult Fiction collections are shelved adjacent to the space and inside are comfortable spaces for reading and using technology. The new space has been very popular.

The two-year, half million dollar project, was made possible with significant support from contributions to the Friends Foundation. The Better Building Better Service campaign raised \$255,555 in cash and pledges, with \$200,000 from the City capital improvements project budget, reserved gift funds and some State money supplementing the Foundation contributions.

Programming

The new space brought new opportunities, especially for teens. An intern staffed the space 15 hours a week during the school year to provide access to video game consoles, laptops and iPads. The number of staffed hours rose to 27.5 in the summer. The remaining 39.5 hours the library is open the room is supervised by Reference Desk staff with more limited technology available. A wide variety of programs have been offered. 307 teen programs were held in FY14, an increase of 52%. They were attended by 3,401 teens (increase of 132%).

Adult programming grew as well with increases in both number of programs (8%) and attendance (50%). This year featured a mix of long-standing and new partnerships. Included were Project Green, ECO Iowa City, The Center, Iowa ACLU, UI School of Library and Information Science, and UI College of Education. Two new series of programs were a big hit – one was scanning days which were repeated four times. Another was Bring Your Own Book (BYOB), a book discussion that meets in local restaurants and bars.

Children's programming continues to be a mainstay of library services. Last year we delivered 498 in house and 279 outreach programs with a total attendance of 39,683. Twenty percent of the households with children who responded to the community survey said they attended a children's program on their last visit to the Library.

The Summer Reading Program, a long time mainstay of library programming, has been booming in recent years. This year we set new program registration records with 2,720 elementary school age children registered, 441 babies, 404 teens and 1,257 adults. The growth in registration can be partially attributed to springtime visits to area schools and an effort to issue library cards to Spanish-speaking community members. This project was done with the assistance of volunteers from First Mennonite Church. For the first time we formally partnered with the Iowa City Community School District, United Way of Johnson and Washington Counties, and the public libraries in Coralville and North Liberty to register and track students by school and grade. With a grant from United Way of Johnson and Washington Counties, each of the libraries was able to expand outreach to at-risk children. Hopefully, this partnership will continue to find ways to evolve and strengthen summer reading programs in our area.

Collections

Providing materials people want and need is a core function of a public library and Iowa City is no exception. Although the ubiquitous nature of the internet, video streaming and music downloading have caused some drop off in the total number of materials checked out, 77% of all respondents to the community survey said they checked out library materials during their last visit to the library. Checkouts and downloads last year totaled 1,414,428.

Increasing the number of holds a person may have at one time from 5 to 8, and allowing holds to be placed for “on shelf” items has proven popular. FY14 saw the number of holds placed increase 15%. Use of electronic collections is also growing. The number of downloads of books (including audio) and music increased last year by over 18% to a total of 78,853.

One consequence of stable or dropping circulation in many areas is a higher percentage of items that are on the shelf at any one time. Library staff are continually removing materials that are old, damaged or no longer used to insure we have the space for in demand new titles. Last year we added 33,130 volumes to our collection and withdrew 32,880. Many of those were sold by the Friends Foundation.

Keeping pace with technology

One of the reasons behind the building updates was a desire to offer more technology options for children – from the AWE computers designed for pre-schoolers and the new interactive table, to the iPads and game consoles available in the new teen space. The building improvements also made room for an additional Self Checkout station on the second floor and a more prominent location for the one in the Ellen Buchanan Children’s Room. These very visible services are being well used. Our biggest technology investment last year was a major upgrade to the software that runs our “library” systems including patron registration and circulation records as well as the library catalog. The system changes brought improvements to

the integration of electronic materials into the catalog and will allow more improvements in the future.

The web site look has not changed substantially, but a great deal of work went into converting to a responsive design that fluidly adapts the site to different screen sizes, making it easier to use on a variety of equipment, including smart phones. The improvements have been very well received.

And, behind the scenes to all but a few library staff members, we learned a new financial/accounting/personnel system introduced by the City. The new system meant massive changes to the way we pay our bills, develop financial reports, and record time worked for staff. It continues to be a challenge and an opportunity.

Funding

Challenges also lie ahead with maintaining the level of services in Iowa City that people have enjoyed for many years. The City's budget is being drastically affected by the recent changes in State laws and we will be part of the community conversation about how we deal with the changes and challenges. In the last two years the Friends Foundation has done an extraordinary job raising private funds to support the building remodeling, technology improvements, collections and programs, but private funding cannot replace public support for basic services.

We know the community places a high value on library services and we will work to maintain and improve services as we have in the past.

Susan Craig,
Library Director